The Metro West:
Considering Urban Economic Development

A Workshop for Western Canadian Urban Policy Researchers and Practitioners

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INTRODUCTION

In the new global economy, cities are the main social and economic drivers. As a result, it is clear that western Canada's economic growth and prosperity are increasingly dependent upon the success of its cities. Recognizing this, and in order to promote an understanding of the strengths of the urban West, the Canada West Foundation launched *Metro West*, a one-day workshop designed to develop a network of western Canadian urban researchers and practitioners. This workshop was made possible by the funding support of Western Economic Diversification and the Policy Research Secretariat.

The network's goal is to promote ongoing urban economic research, and the development of relevant programmes and policies, to enhance the viability of western Canada in the new economy. It is necessary that Canadian policy makers, researchers and citizens are aware of the positive economic contributions made by western Canadian cities regionally, nationally and globally.

"As Canada passes into the 21st century, the process of urbanization continues unabated, molding and reshaping the national landscape."

Vander Ploeg, Casey, Cities@2000. Canada West Foundation: 1999.

To create a foundation for the development of this network, three main topics were explored at *Metro West*:

- The role of different levels of government, the non-profit sector, and the private sector in urban economic development;
- The place of western Canadian cities in the Canadian federal system and in the global market place; and
- The top priorities and challenges facing western Canadian cities.

In order to elicit informed discourse regarding these topics, and to establish the basis for an ongoing network, a number of highly regarded urban practitioners and researchers were invited to participate in the *Metro West* workshop. The workshop findings provide a foundation for the development of a western Canadian urban practitioner and researcher network. They also provide a strong indication of the types of issues that need to be addressed if the urban West is to reach its full potential as a driver in the new global economy.

ABOUT THE WORKSHOP

The Metro West: Considering Urban Economic Development workshop was held in Calgary, Alberta on November 2 and 3, 2000. The workshop provided a forum wherein leading western Canadian urban practitioners and researchers could network and discuss topics related to western Canadian urban economics. The four main objectives were to:

- solicit the opinions of top urban policy researchers and practitioners on a number of issues related to the role of western urban centres in Canada;
- establish a western Canadian urban policy research and practitioner community, which could then be maintained through a variety of mechanisms;
- encourage ongoing western Canadian urban research; and
- increase the profile of western Canadian urban research.

Thirty-five western Canadian urban researchers and practitioners attended the Metro West workshop. Every effort was made to ensure equal provincial and organizational representation; however, due to conflicting schedules, participants from both British Columbia and Saskatchewan were under-represented.

Leading western Canadian researchers and practitioners from a broad range of academic disciplines, government departments, and private organizations and institutions attended the Metro West workshop.

THE METRO WEST PROGRAM

Dinner Key Note Address

Ms. Georgine Ulmer, President and CEO of Calgary Inc.: "Raising the International Profile of Western Canadian Cities."

Morning Plenary: Municipalities in Federalism

Dr. Roger Gibbins, President and CEO of the Canada West Foundation: "The Role of Western Canadian Municipalities in Federalism."

Concurrent Morning Session A: Federal and Provincial Roles in Urban Development

Mr. Jim Monzer, Western Economic Diversification: "Federal Role in Urban Development."

Mr. Brian Peddigrew, Director of Planning and Coordination, Alberta Municipal Affairs: "Provincial Role in Urban Development: The Edmonton Experience."

Breakout Discussion Questions:

1. What is the optimal level of involvement for each government? Where do federal and provincial governments have the leverage to make the greatest impact?
2. How could responsibility be divided between governments, business and community groups? What are the options for partnerships? What are the barriers?
3. What other program and policy options should be considered? What urban development activities are occurring in other jurisdictions (within and outside Canada) that present lessons for consideration?

Concurrent Morning Session B: Western Canadian Urban Economies

Dr. Mel McMillan, Professor of Economics, University of Alberta: "Western Urban Economies: What Do Western Cities Need to Become Globally Competitive?"

Dr. Earl Fry, Professor of Political Science and Endowed Professor of Canadian Studies, Brigham Young University: "Globalization and Information Technology: Impact on the Economic Competitiveness of Western Canada's Cities."

Breakout Discussion Questions:

1. To what extent are there regional disparities in urban economic development?
2. What challenges are created by the increasing economic importance of cities?
3. Should/can western Canadian cities work together to promote regional economic development? What are the advantages and disadvantages of cooperation?

"There is a need for broader federal debate regarding a national vision for cities and their role as primary drivers of the new economy."

Workshop Participant

Lunch Key Note Address

The Honourable Glen Murray, Mayor of Winnipeg: "Western Canadian Strengths in Economic Development."

Concurrent Afternoon Session A: Economic Development in Western Canadian Urban Regions

Dr. Andrew Sancton, Professor of Political Science, University of Western Ontario: "Linkages between Economic Development and Urban Government Structure."

Dr. Joe Garcea, Professor of Political Studies, University of Saskatchewan: "Municipal Renewal Initiatives in the West: Implication for Cities and Urban Centres in the West."

Breakout Session Questions:

1. What are the practical challenges in creating and implementing regional economic development strategies? What is necessary to address these challenges?
2. Who should be involved in developing these strategies? Is there a role for business and community groups? For First Nations? If so, how can these groups be involved?
3. Who should be responsible for coordinating economic development in urban regions?

Concurrent Afternoon Session B: Urban Economic Development Agreements: Lessons from the Field

Mr. Jim Edwards, President and CEO, Edmonton Economic Development Authority: "The Edmonton Economic Development Initiative."

Mr. Doug Kalcsics, Director, Property and Development Services, City of Winnipeg: "The Winnipeg Economic Development Agreement."

Breakout Session Questions:

1. What has been the impact of these agreements? What evaluation research needs to be done, if any?
2. What is the role of business and community partners? Should this role be expanded?
3. Would similar agreements be beneficial for other western cities? How can partnership agreements be structured to best meet the needs of all partners?

Afternoon Plenary: Challenges in Western Canadian Urban Research

Dr. Harry Kitchen, Professor of Economics, Trent University: "Practical Challenges in Conducting Urban Research."

Dr. Edd LeSage, Associate Dean (Academic), Government Studies, University of Alberta: "Increasing the Profile of Urban Policy Research in Western Canada."

BUILDING THE FOUNDATION FOR A NETWORK

A common theme agreed upon by participants was the need to forge stronger relationships between researchers and practitioners to fill gaps in both research and practice. In order to create the basis for a network of urban researchers and practitioners, it is necessary first to create common ground on which to work. The following section combines key issues for consideration generated from both the presentations and the group discussions. It should be stressed that these issues represent common themes raised at the workshop, and do not reflect the position of any one individual. It is hoped that by creating an agenda of common challenges and opportunities facing western Canadian urban development, a community of experts in the field will join forces to address these issues. These issues provide opportunity for both future research and policy development.

"Academics and practitioners should more aggressively challenge one another with comparative analyses, models and recommended approaches."

Workshop Participant

Key present and future challenges in urban economic development in western Canada:

- There is little local control over the key determinants of successful economic development. For example: availability of production resources, labour costs, and government fiscal policies.

- At the same time, municipalities do have some powers that impact on urban economic development. These include: quality of life issues, land availability, infrastructure, and the ability to monitor and advise provincial and federal governments.

- The roles and responsibilities of each level of government are not clearly defined. This leads to overlap and gaps in research and practice.

- It is important for municipalities to be visible as viable and important drivers in the national and global economies.

- In order to achieve greater municipal autonomy, it is necessary to balance five governance factors: structure, powers, policies, leadership and management. The significance of urban structure as a determinant of urban development was brought into question many times and at multiple levels.

- Quality of life challenges and environmental concerns are often neglected in urban economic development discourse.

Policy options for promoting the future prosperity of western Canadian cities:

- Develop participatory government strategies that encourage active citizen engagement at all levels of decision making.

- Establish funding initiatives that promote greater municipal autonomy. Downloading of urban government responsibilities must be met with increased municipal ability to generate revenue.

- Promote a collaborative approach whereby urban economic development policies and programmes are joint federal, provincial and municipal initiatives with a strong business link. All players should recognize the important role that each level of government has in promoting the future prosperity of western Canadian cities. Due to the growing urban Aboriginal population, urban Aboriginal communities and governments should also be involved in consultations, and their role in urban development clearly defined.

- Use Canadian examples of tri-level government urban development agreements as models for future initiatives in the western Canadian region. These models should open policy dialogue at the municipal, provincial and federal government levels. Relationships that are developed should be sustainable in nature.

- Recognize that economic development authorities and autonomous urban development agencies also have a large role to play. However, their power to influence urban development, like that of municipal governments, is limited due to lack of both capacity and power.

"Local governments have considerable ability to maintain a good quality of life for their cities, which in turn promotes development. The challenge is to gain upper level government and private sector support for initiatives that promote improved quality of life."

Workshop Participant

The role of western Canadian cities in the region's economy and the impact of globalization and information technologies:

- Western Canada has an increasing share of the Canadian population. Because the majority of western Canadians live in cities and most business takes place in cities, the majority of a province's revenue, creativity, new technology advancement and cultural diversity are generated in cities. These drive the national economy and have a huge impact on how successfully Canada, and western Canada as a region, will compete globally.

- Cities have the power to create an appealing image and quality of life to attract businesses, and therefore business development should include creating a positive business environment.

- In the past, the size and the geographic location of a city were considered important for competitiveness. Due to the devolution and decentralization that has taken place as a result of globalization and advances in information technology, smaller centres are becoming more important in the global economic playing field. As a result, western Canadian cities have the ability to compete on more equal terms with other global cities.

- Western Canadian cities should create an information technology and globalization checklist in order to assess their present level of competitiveness. This checklist should include an inventory of the strengths and weaknesses of each city in terms of its ability to compete globally. Items to include are whether or not a city has increasingly become knowledge centred, whether it has the capability to attract global companies and civic organizations, and whether the city embraces innovation and diversity. This checklist will assist municipalities in building an appropriate strategy for becoming regionally, nationally and globally competitive.

"Globalization and information technology have completely changed the potential roles of cities. We have to be proactive and jump on these opportunities."

Workshop Participant

RESEARCH CHALLENGES IN URBAN DEVELOPMENT

The Metro West workshop was initiated on the assumption that there is a lack of a western Canadian urban economic development researcher and practitioner network, and that this results in information gaps. This assumption proved correct. However, participants pointed out that there are many linkages and smaller networks that can be tapped to create a larger regional network. For example, most western Canadian universities have urban development programs and institutions, most cities have professional associations, and many governments have departments that focus on urban issues. Efforts should be made to bring these elements together in a formal structure.

Participants stressed that there is both a need for further research on western Canadian urban economic development and an interest in developing a western Canadian urban

economic network. With the capacity to pursue further research and create a network established, the challenge of limiting the scope of the research and creating a framework for the network remained. Participants felt that Western Canada as a region can be used as the framework with which to limit the scope of research and the network.

Dr. Edd LeSage presented three proposals to increase the profile of urban policy research and practice in western Canada, all of which rely on further funding and collaboration between researchers and practitioners:

1. A single organization may take a leadership role in bringing together available literature. Gaps in literature could then easily be assessed. This organization could also be in charge of maintaining the network and information dissemination, perhaps in the form of a newsletter.
2. A Centre for Excellence model approach may be taken. This model promotes a multi-nodal approach that has links to the research community, community groups and practitioners. Networking efforts often result in joint publications, presentations and workshops.
3. A meso approach may be taken whereby a research agenda is advanced and formalized and a means by which to animate it is developed.

In general, participants agreed that one, or a combination of these three approaches, was necessary to promote an on-going urban economic development practitioner and research network. While participants did not come to a conclusion as to which approach would best suit the current needs of the group, it was agreed that a future workshop should take place so that this particular subject could be investigated further.

"There is a scarcity of urban development research out there, especially research that is policy centred. It's time to get together, work together and fill in the gaps."

Workshop Participant

CONTENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 2001 POLICY RESEARCH SECRETARIAT'S NATIONAL POLICY RESEARCH:

The Policy Research Secretariat was a co-sponsor of the Metro West workshop, and is an active player in Canadian public policy research through its annual National Policy Research conference.

A review of information provided by participants, as well as a review of previous CWF Western Cities Project research, suggests the following list of potential urban development topics to be addressed at the next Policy Research Conference:

Urban Government in the Canadian Federation. There are three central questions surrounding the role of municipalities within federalism. First, what are the existing models of municipal-federal arrangements and public policy-making that can be extracted from the comparative experience of other federal states? Second, which models of municipal power best fit current Canadian political realities and future challenges? And third, should municipalities formally be considered a "third order of government" within the text of national and provincial constitutions?

Managing Growth in Urban Centres. The rapid growth of many cities presents particular challenges. While the cities have an improved tax base, there is increased demand upon public services, and cities can face difficulties keeping pace. Studies of how different Canadian cities have attempted to manage growth, and the impacts of their efforts, would provide useful comparative knowledge.

"The discussion should broaden to include the three E's – Equity, Environment and Economics."

Workshop Participant

Marketing Cities on the Global Stage. Largely as a result of globalization and information technology, western Canadian cities are changing from resource-based economies to information-based centres. Research into strategies that define ways to use this new image of the West as a marketing tool to attract new global businesses should be undertaken.

Globalization, Information Technology and Municipal Governments. In the present age of globalization, information technology is an important communication tool. Municipalities can take advantage of this tool to disseminate information and encourage public commentary on important urban issues. Research into identifying options and best practices for using information and promote citizen engagement is needed.

Improving the Quality of Life in Western Canadian Cities. There are many challenges associated with urban growth and development that impact negatively on an urban centre's capacity to maintain and improve the quality of life of its citizens. Research to identify options to improve a municipality's strength in this arena is needed.

Urban Research Network. Despite its importance to Canadian governance and the quality of life in Canada, urban policy does not have an established and wide-reaching research and practitioner network. By definition, urban research is cross-disciplinary research, and isolated researchers in the "think tank", political science, economics,

environmental studies and urban planning communities are generating important studies on western Canadian urban issues. What is needed is a formal network of researchers so to avoid duplication and allow the cross-pollination of ideas. An urban research and practitioner network would identify researchers active in urban policy, and link these researchers through electronic list-servs, workshops and other forums. The first step of this agenda item has already taken place through the Metro West workshop. Follow-up steps can be discussed at the PRS meeting.

CONCLUSION

Results of the workshop positively identified the need for a western Canadian urban economic research and practitioner network. Key issues were identified to focus the research needs of the community.

"What an important initiative. Let's do it again, and soon."

Workshop participant

Due to current patterns of urbanization and globalization, assessments of western Canada's economic future must consider the role and viability of the region's large urban centres. It is clear that western Canada's economic growth is increasingly dependent upon the success of its cities. A network of practitioners and researchers is necessary to create an understanding of the strengths of the urban West and the role of various stakeholders in promoting urban growth so that the region can build and expand its national and global position.

The Canada West Foundation has developed a directory of western Canadian urban economic development practitioners and researchers. It is an inclusive but not exhaustive list of people who focus on western Canadian urban issues. This directory should be expanded, and can be used as the vehicle for future collaboration (web sites, discussion groups and workshops). In their evaluation of the workshop, Metro West participants expressed a strong interest in attending future workshops of related subjects.

It is important that the momentum created by the Metro West workshop be sustained. If the significant role that western cities can play as drivers of the national economy and within the global market place is to be fully realized, it is essential that the experts in the field collaborate and apply their knowledge to the task.

ABOUT THE CANADA WEST FOUNDATION

The Canada West Foundation is an independent, non-partisan, non-profit public policy research institute dedicated to introducing western perspectives into current Canadian policy debates through the production and dissemination of objective research to serve as a catalyst for informed public debate, and initiatives for active citizen education and engagement in the Canadian public policy process.

Since 1971, the Canada West Foundation has provided citizens and policymakers with non-partisan research on a wide range of issues of critical importance to western Canadians. The Canada West Foundation (CWF) also hosts a variety of citizen engagement initiatives such as conferences, workshops and student programs. CWF partners with a wide range of universities, government agencies, business associations, community non-profit organizations, foundations and media to ensure that our research and education programs have maximum impact.

ABOUT THE WESTERN CITIES PROJECT

The past of the "Prairie West" is being replaced by the modern reality of urbanization, complete with vibrant municipal economies and strong citizen identification with local communities. The goal of the Western Cities Project is to find policy directions to help make cities better places in which people can live and businesses can thrive. Research topics that are being explored under the Western Cities Project include: Urban Finance; Urban Regions; Urban Growth and Affordable Housing; Municipalities in Federalism; Urban Arts and Culture; and Marketing Cities on the Global Stage.

Western Cities Project publications released prior to January 2001 include:

- ✓ The Impact of Urban Growth on Affordable Housing: An Economic Analysis
- ✓ A Roof Over Our Heads: Affordable Housing and Urban Growth in Western Canada
- ✓ Financing Western Cities: Issues and Trends
- ✓ ISSUES 2000: Challenges on the Western Urban Landscape
- ✓ Cities @ 2000: Canada's Urban Landscape - New Trends, Emerging Issues

Information on these reports and other CWF research can be found at www.cwf.ca

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